

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1919

As Reported by House Committee On:
Education

Title: An act relating to kindergarten.

Brief Description: Authorizing a full-day kindergarten program as part of basic education.

Sponsors: Representatives Haigh, Hudgins, Hunter, Morrell, Hasegawa, O'Brien, Lantz and Chase.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Education: 2/24/05, 3/1/05 [DP].

Brief Summary of Bill

- Authorizes school districts to offer full-day kindergarten as part of basic education.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 7 members: Representatives Quall, Chair; P. Sullivan, Vice Chair; Haigh, Hunter, McDermott, Santos and Tom.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 4 members: Representatives Talcott, Ranking Minority Member; Anderson, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Curtis and Shabro.

Staff: Sydney Forrester (786-7120).

Background:

State law does not require a child to attend kindergarten, although the state provides funding under basic education for a half-day of kindergarten instruction. School districts also may offer a full-day kindergarten program, but the state's basic education funding model allocates moneys for kindergarten students only for 180 half-days of instruction. Approximately 59 school districts report offering a full-day kindergarten program. Districts offering full-day programs may supplement their basic education moneys with local dollars, Initiative 728 dollars, and/or tuition payments from parents in order to fund a full day of kindergarten instruction.

Summary of Bill:

At the option of a school district, the basic education program for kindergarten students may consist of 180 full days of instruction. Beginning in the 2006-07 school year, for districts electing to operate a full-day kindergarten program, the Superintendent of Public Instruction must distribute moneys sufficient to constitute a basic education allocation for kindergarten students based on one full school year of 180 full days of instruction.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect September 1, 2006.

Testimony For: Full-day kindergarten is something we have to do in order to attain the educational outcomes we have established for this state. There are states that have moved to full-day kindergarten and some have been skeptical whether it is appropriate for the age of these children. But over time, many have come to realize that this makes sense for several reasons. Full-day kindergarten avoids the mid-day shuffle of children that wastes valuable learning time. Schools that have made the greatest gains in student achievement have included full-day kindergarten. Savings in transportation funding, and savings for parents in daycare costs are important considerations. Although this is a high-cost proposal, we need to start looking at it and talking about the benefits of full-day kindergarten because this is what is best for kids.

The Superintendent of Public Instruction supports creating opportunities for districts to offer full-day kindergarten programs. If more districts had resources we believe more would move to a full-day of instruction. About 59 districts currently are offering full-day kindergarten. In addition to savings in transportation and childcare costs, there are other savings in terms of addressing children's learning needs earlier rather than later.

Early childhood is an extremely important time in a child's academic life. It is important to make the program developmentally appropriate with time to learn and time to grow. Parents respond to the concept favorably. A child's readiness for first grade is improved with full-day kindergarten.

The Washington Education Association (WEA) has long advocated for more state investments in early learning, including full-day kindergarten. School board members and local districts have been interested in this concept for a long time. Research has shown these programs lead to success especially for at-risk students. The optional nature of the full-day kindergarten proposal is important so that districts who don't want to, or cannot, offer a full day of instruction will not be required to do so. It is important to realize the interrelatedness of all the factors that come to bear on a district's decision whether to offer a full-day program. Some districts do not have the space to run full-day programs.

This is a top priority for school principals. The populations from poverty and English language learners can benefit greatly by this added boost at their entry to the education system. The benefits show in later years in terms of test scores.

Testimony Against: None.

Persons Testifying: (In support) Representative Haigh, prime sponsor; Greg Williamson, Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction; Tita Mallory, Aberdeen School District; Gary King, Washington Education Association; Dan Steele, Washington State School Directors' Association; Barbara Mertens, Washington Association of School Administrators; Doris Reeves, Washington Association for the Education of Young Children; and Rainer Houser, Association of Washington School Principals.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.